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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND AF/SPG

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SUBJECT: SUDANESE IN EGYPT TURN TO GANG VIOLENCE

REF: 2006 Cairo 170

¶1. Summary: Sudanese gang violence has become a problem of increasing concern in Cairo. Gang members are Sudanese youths who face poor economic prospects in Egypt, are unwilling to return to worse prospects in Sudan, and are less able to resettle in third countries following the 2005 peace agreement between North and South Sudan. Gang violence is mostly directed at third-country, marginalized Africans or between gangs themselves, as Egyptian police tend to look the other way as long as violence does not impact Egyptian citizens.

Sudanese in Gangs Poor, Have Few Prospects

¶2. Sudanese gangs comprise mainly uneducated and poor Sudanese men between 16 and 35 years old. As of November 12 there were 500 to 600 members of these gangs based in the Maadi, Ain Shams, Nasr City and Abbaseya districts of Cairo, according to Boutros Agot, Director of the Cairo-based Serving the Refugees and Community Organization. Sudanese who have joined gangs are mainly from marginalized areas in Sudan, including Darfur, the Nubia Mountains, and Southern Sudan according to Jaafar Salem, a researcher at the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Center (FMRS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Agot told us that Sudanese gang violence is on the rise due to the lack of education and employment prospects, poverty, and absence of necessity services for Sudanese in Egypt.

¶3. The 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between North and South Sudan was a turning point for Sudanese in Egypt. With the end of hostilities, UNHCR/Cairo began giving South Sudanese asylum-seeker, rather than refugee, status. In practice, this removed the possibility of resettlement in a third country for these Sudanese, who were faced with poor prospects in Egypt or even worse situations returning to Sudan. Sudanese youth thus began turning to violence in the streets of Cairo, according to Abeer Etefa, Senior Regional Global Public Information Officer at the UNHCR Cairo Bureau. The change in UNHCR resettlement policy was the reason behind a late 2005 Sudanese sit-in outside the UNHCR office in downtown Cairo, which was violently dispersed by Egyptian police, with about 30 refugee fatalities. (reftel).

Gangs Attack Africans, Each Other

¶4. Sudanese gangs in Cairo target other marginalized Africans, such as Somalis, Nigerians and people from the Comoros Islands, according to Salem. For instance, a recent report by the Serving the Refugees and Community Organization reported that Sudanese gangs in Cairo attacked Somalis 22 times during the month of Ramadan in 2007 (from mid-September 2007 to mid-October 2007). Agot told us that the illegal status of many marginalized Africans in Cairo prevents them from going to the police to report violence, for fear they would be deported for illegal residence in Egypt. Inter-gang fights also sometimes occur, said Salem. In one such incident in June 2007, which was widely reported in local press, a Sudanese was killed near the AUC campus in downtown Cairo during a fight between two Sudanese

gangs over a girl.

Gangs Prompt Little Egyptian Police Response

15. Our contacts tell us that a de facto agreement has developed between Sudanese gangs and the Egyptian police, in which the gangs do not attack Egyptians and the police mostly overlook intra-African violence. Salem and Agot contend that Egyptian police respond slowly or even "turn a blind eye" to crimes committed by Sudanese gangs as long as they stay away from Egyptians or other Arabs. Etefa told us that Sudanese refugees confirmed this perception, reporting to UNHCR that the Egyptian police do not interfere with Sudanese gangs. However, Agot said that his organization has recently worked with Egyptian authorities to better patrol the neighborhoods where the gangs operate, in the hopes of deterring violence by intimidation.

16. Agot complained that gang members cannot be deported due to UNHCR and Sudanese Embassy intervention. Agot said that the UNHCR lobbies to protect most Sudanese who are arrested, as they are often registered as refugees or asylum-seekers, and that the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo also intervenes to protect Sudanese gang members. Etefa defended UNHCR's policies, saying that deportation exposes Sudanese to danger back in Sudan, and that gang members receive fair trials according to Egyptian legal procedures. Professor Ibrahim Nour, head of the African Studies Center at AUC, told us, however, that Egypt recently deported five Sudanese due to their gang activities for the first time in 2007.

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